

two soldiers who had attended him from London. On this provocation a small but angry crowd from the three villages was soon collected. They told the commissioner flatly that he would not get a penny out of them, and that the conference must end. Bampton ordered his men-at-arms to make arrests. But the blood of the fishermen was now up, and they chased soldiers and commissioner together out of Brentwood. Bampton galloped off to London to complain to his masters. The men of Fobbing, Corringham and Stanford, fearing the speedy vengeance of the government (for they were within half a day's ride of London), took to the woods, and passed from village to village exciting the people of Essex to revolt.¹ Other bands of outlaws were afoot. The obnoxious statutes regulating wages had driven many free labourers to take to the woods, and the runaway villeins preferred a roving life to the servitude from which they had fled. It has been suggested that the stern realities of this epoch in social history gave fresh meaning and renewed popularity to those ancient ballads, which told how Robin Hood and his merry men robbed the rich and loved the poor, in the depth of the free green forest.² For many years before and many years after the rebellion, the waste places and pleasant woodlands were the haunt of desperate men, whose numbers were a shame to government and a danger to society. They prowled along the borders of civilisation, ever ready to swoop down when occasion offered. This year they poured in hundreds into field and town, for England lay at their mercy.

Meanwhile Bampton had arrived at Westminster with his story. The Chief Justice of the King's Bench was at once sent down into Essex with a commission of 'trailbaston' to restore order. He was treated with as little ceremony as the tax-collector, and driven back no less speedily to London. The inhabitants of the revolted fishing villages had roused the country. The rebellion was well afoot, and its ugliest aspect—massacre—was not wanting. The judge was spared, but the jurors were beheaded. Three unfortunate clerks who had been serving Bampton on his late commission were also caught and decapitated. Their heads were placed

- H. .R., 509-10; Higden, ix. 6 ;
Knighton, **ii.** 131; Con*. *Eulog.*, **851-2.**

³ R<§v., ix.